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The Political Legacy of Lyndon LaRouche (w/ Matthew N Lyons)

The Final Straw Radio - August 13, 2023



on the Three Way Fight website, and there are a lot of other people who've written useful stuff about it as well.

TFSR: Yeah. I'll have a bunch of links in the show notes. So including the King book online, as well as the Kevin Coogan book that I mentioned. Just to bring it back around to what people can pay attention to next. Can you say a little bit more about that *Three Way Fight: Revolutionary Politics and Antifascism*? You mentioned it's going to be due out in the spring from Kersplebedeb and PM Press. But what the format is? Is it a collection of essays by different authors or is it just you and the co-editor jumping in and running?

MNL: It's a collection of essays and interviews and program statements, in some cases, from a number of different authors and political groups. Many of the pieces are pieces that were published on the Three Way Fight website at various times, since its founding in 2004. But there are a number of pieces from elsewhere. Things that appeared elsewhere online, or that haven't been published previously.

So, it's going to be a substantial book. But we certainly had to be selective in terms of what we included, but is intended to be an introduction to Three Way Fight politics in terms of what it stands for, how, as a political approach, it has developed, where it comes from politically in terms of its rootedness in past political movements, and the interventions that it's involved in recent and current debates.

I think it's something that will be meaningful to people who are trying to make sense of just really tough situations that we're in terms of how do we not just understand our enemies, but what kinds of approaches can we take to organizing. There's a whole section on organizing and strategy in terms of how we go about that in a way that's both principled and is going to connect with people. There will be more information forthcoming about it. But there are preliminary listings for it on both the PM Press website and Left-Wing Books, which is an arm of Kersplebedeb Publishing.

TFSR: Cool, Matthew, stay cool. Thank you so much for the conversation. I really appreciate it and looking forward to the book.

MNL: Thank you very much for the opportunity. I appreciated the chance to talk about this stuff.

Matthew N Lyons of Three Way Fight blog about the political legacy of Lyndon LaRouche, cultic leftist turned fascist US political figure from the 1970's through his death in 2019. For the hour, Matthew talks about the network of organizations and publications of the LaRouche movement, some of their approaches toward peeling adherents from the left, antisemitic conspiracy theories he innovated, methods his movement used to control followers and some of the ripples of LaRouche you can find today.

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red-brown politics that, in different forms, has become disturbingly widespread.

I don't know how to measure that in terms of numbers of people or relative influence, but the Rage Against the War Machine rally was not a one-time anomaly. It's something that, we've seen in other versions of this convergence of ostensible leftists and far-rightists. LaRouchites really helped to contribute to that. Part of the issue there is when people see opposition to the established order as more important than egalitarian principles, then they're much more willing to ally with fascists and people who are close to fascists than they would be if they were putting egalitarian principles at the center or as something that we need to remain committed to. At the beginning of this interview, I talked about my involvement in the Three Way Fight project. This is part of the situation that the Three Way Fight project was developed in order to address. It says, "There is an established system of exploitation and oppression that is killing us, and that needs to be overthrown. And there is a rising far-right movement or constellation of far-right movements, that in some ways are fueling that and feeding and supporting that, and in other ways are in opposition to that. So both of these enemies need to be confronted. Those are different struggles."

One of the ideas behind the Three Way Fight is no alliances with the state and no alliances with fascists. We need to put forward a vision of liberatory change and a society that's based on respect for everybody and all groups. That means a challenge to the established order, as well as a challenge to those on the far right who, in some ways, are opposing the established order. So it means not aligning with fascists and also not taking up a defensive stance that says, "Well, we just need to support the established order, because it's under attack from people who are even worse."

The system that we have in the United States has a degree of space for political speech and political action that doesn't exist in some countries. It's important to defend that. It's important to defend the gains that have been won through the struggle for organized labor, women's empowerment, LGBT rights, and so on. But that has to be based on independent radical organizing, it can't be based on the idea that the existing order is gonna protect us if we just submit to it.

That's a long-winded, somewhat rambling set of thoughts. But again, I think that the LaRouche legacy is something that we need to respond to thoughtfully and in a nuanced way, not just in a reactive way. It's not just rejecting what they say and then siding with whoever is opposing them, but it's also not just siding with whoever is opposing those in power.

TFSR: My question was a ramby and disjointed question. Thank you very much for the thoughtful responses. I really appreciate it.

That's the questions that I had. I wonder if you had any other closing thoughts on LaRouche, LaRouchites, something I didn't make space for, didn't ask specifically about? Or was that good where we left it?

MNL: I think that was good. I've covered all the main things that I wanted to say. I would just encourage people to do their own reading. I mentioned Dennis King's book, I have various writings about LaRouche. There's a whole chapter about his movement in my book *Insurgent Supremacists*. There are at least a couple of articles

So the zombie trudges on in the widow and ex-partner, collaborator Helga Zepp-LaRouche, and her Schiller Institute. As they run their conferences and nonprofits around the world, their political children still creep around. In the last couple of years, the internet gave us the terms PatSoc for patriotic socialists. It's an Orwellian term. Or #MAGACommunism, as they bubbled to the surface as characters like Caleb Maupin, or Jimmy Dore of the dirtbag left make their way into at least the internet dialog popping up at demonstrations, holding weird press conferences. The media landscape includes Russia Today or RT and affiliates like the Gray Zone.

As you've mentioned in past articles, there's ideological overlap and collaboration in conferences between LaRouche, Malofayev, and Alexander Dugin. We see anti-Semitism, chauvinism, and patriarchy show up in elitist narratives, all in his mix. The PATSOCs that I just mentioned, pivot from red to brown or left to right. As I've been aware of most of these groups, I don't hear about them happening in real life. I hear about hashtags, I hear about live streams, I hear about pretty ridiculous and really impromptu press conferences. But there was this gathering earlier this year. It was a demonstration in Washington DC that was called "Rage Against the War Machine". It had a lot of participation from people like weird libertarians, Ron Paul was there, and Cynthia McKinney, a former member of the Green Party was there, you just have this hodge-podge of a bunch of characters from the left and the right as well as full on Nazis now calling themselves National Syndicalists or whatever. [Matthew Heimbach].

It's this weird mish-mash, that we both saw come out of the failures of the anti-war movement of the early 2000s. It was how do we fill the room with as many people as possible, it doesn't matter how much they agree or disagree, which has something to be said about that. But I think there are a lot of parts of the legacy of Lyndon LaRouche's thought in some of these elements that make space to bring in left and right ideas. So I wonder if you had observations about the people that have participated in Schiller Institute, or have been LaRouchites in the past, and are pushing this model of socialism for America that takes in an Americanism element ala Francis Parker Yockey to some degree. Does it seem their project has a pull, has a foothold, especially for frustrated leftists and shifting them to the right? Or does it seem mostly an internet phenomenon?

MNL: I don't know that I'm in a position to quantify, to answer in a quantifiable way, but I do think that LaRouche promoted a number of elements, political themes, and political strategies that have come up repeatedly in other parts of the far right, and to some extent, among ostensible leftists. You can't always say, is it that people were borrowing from him directly, or was it more of a larger phenomenon? But I do think it's fair to say that he and his network have contributed to the development of a number of important themes. Conspiracism didn't start with LaRouche but he definitely contributed to developing it and showing how it could be used to appeal to people from a wide range of political backgrounds, how it could be presented in ways that flew under the radar, or that deflected criticism. That's something that others have picked up on. He helped to pioneer a kind of

Matthew N Lyons: My name is Matthew N Lyons. I study far-right political movements and their relationships with established systems of power. I co-wrote the book *Right-Wing Populism in America* with Chip Berlet. It was published by Guilford Press in 2000. Then my book *Insurgent Supremacists: The US Far-Right Challenge to State Empire* was published in 2018 by PM Press and Kersplebedeb. I'm a longtime contributor to the radical anti-fascist website Three Way Fight. You can find a lot of my writings there. Forthcoming work I want to announce, with Xtn Alexander, one of the founders of Three Way Fight, I am co-editing a new collection, a book entitled *Three Way Fight: Revolutionary Politics and Anti-Fascism*, which PM Press and Kersplebedeb will be putting out next spring.

TFSR: That's awesome. I was excited to see that on social media. I can't wait to check that out. Thanks a lot for joining me. We spoke before on some of your prior writings just around the far insurgent, far right more generally. I've invited you here to speak about a quirky case in American history, that of Lyndon LaRouche. He was a leftist turn right-wing demagogue, a cult leader with a big shadow, whose legacy continues to confound and impact political landscapes in the USA. This is something that you wrote about in your prior book if you wouldn't mind giving a bit of an overview about who LaRouche was and we can get into some of his ideas and organizing in subsequent questions.

MNL: Sure. As you said, Lyndon LaRouche was a former leftist who became the head of a very idiosyncratic fascist cult that was active from the 1970s on. He died, I believe, in 2019. He was close to 100 years old, and his political organization lives on. LaRouche has often been dismissed as a political crackpot because a lot of his ideas just sound nutty. But what's often missed is that, while his ideas are nutty, he used that as a cover to help him carry out a lot of his activities. He actually was very successful in building an organization with an active political presence on several continents, he engaged in very effective fundraising and intelligence gathering, political dirty tricks, and propaganda activities.

He has influenced far-right politics in several ways over the decades. For example, the conspiracy theory centered on George Soros, the Hungarian-American financier, is believed to have been developed by the LaRouchites in the 1990s. But in addition, he and his network were surprisingly effective in forming ties with political elites, first in the United States in the 1980s. Then, later in Russia and elsewhere. For me, trying to understand LaRouche's politics has been very central to my development as an anti-fascist, as a researcher. I encountered the LaRouchites in doing anti-war work in the early 1990s. Just trying to make sense of what the heck this fascist cult was doing in the anti-war movement, as opposed to supporting US militarism, was something that helped lead me into trying to understand fascist and far-right politics more generally, and tease out its tendencies to co-opt progressive and seemingly leftist themes for supremacist ends, and understand the complexities of fascist relations with those in power, which are often contradictory and warrant careful explanation.

TFSR: I first came across LaRouche in the early 2000s, or mid-2000s at

a junior college campus in California, where they were tabling literature. adherence to the ideology were- They were doing a precursor to the “Here’s an argument, debate me, bro” thing that was happening in the mid-2010s where they had some ideological- They had a series of logic and math tests that they were just calling out people walking by and saying “You can’t figure this out. But you don’t know the answer to this.” Their literature struck me in these days as being reflective of the Seventh Day Adventist visions from the *Book of Revelations* with faces of demons placed onto political figures Henry Kissinger, Barack Obama, or Dick Cheney. But besides the wacky, weird, dehumanizing imagery that seemed almost farcical, I thought it was some Church of the SubGenius stuff...

When I looked at their newspaper, I was seeing arguments around the creation and building of national infrastructure projects, that would raise the quality of living for working people, you could make ecological arguments around expanding the train system and decreasing the amount of cars on the streets. This thing harkens to me a Make-America-Great-Again-type idea, saying that we had these big infrastructure projects, we had these highways and these rail systems that had been up kept for so long, now they’re crumbling, we need to reassert this and rebuild the country, put the country back to work. This was a lot of the themes that I was hearing. They struck me as a strange mixture of right and left, of Americanism and a socialist idea. So, I wonder if you could talk a little bit because you mentioned the adoption of progressive and leftist ideas by far-right characters such as LaRouche, if you could talk a little bit about the appeal that LaRouche has to leftists, a bit about his leftist pedigree and how he turned from the left, if he was ever really there.

MNL: Definitely. I’m actually going to start with a pedigree because the background is important for understanding how his ideology developed. So he was born in 1922. From 1949 to 1966, or thereabouts, he was a member of the Socialist Workers Party, which was the main Trotskyist organization in the United States. Then he left the party, but continued to be involved in leftist politics and in 1969, or thereabouts, formed a new group called the National Caucus of Labor Committees, a Marxist organization that was very much oriented toward the student Left. This was one of several Trotskyist, Maoist, and other kinds of Marxist groups that developed out of Students for Democratic Society, the radical student movement more broadly in the late ‘60s and on.

It had several hundred members and was regarded as a legitimate serious leftist group. After a few years, starting around 1973, LaRouche engineered a radical, 180-degree turn that took the NCLC from a radical left group to a far-right group, and there were several elements of this transformation. One is a shift in the systemic analysis of power, based on capitalism as a system and various related systems of oppression and exploitation, a shift from a systemic analysis to an analysis of history based on conspiracism, conspiracy theories, the idea that power is wielded in secret by small groups of people. Starting with a focus on particular capitalists such as the Rockefellers and taking it from there. Along with that, LaRouche undertook a transformation within the organization that cult psychology tactics

At this point, a lot of people thought he was done. If you read some of the obituaries that came out in 2019, after his death, where it’s presented as if that was his high point. After that, he was just this bizarre anachronism. But what’s missing from that story, is the rebound that he was able to undertake starting in the 1990s, where he rebuilt his organization, he was able to continue to attract new supporters, a new generation of younger supporters. He, as I mentioned, shifted the ostensible political orientation of the network from Reaganite conservatism toward a much more ostensibly leftist stance – anti-war, anti-elite, and very critical of the established order.

Having lost his elite connections in the United States, he went overseas and was actually very effective in developing ties with influential members of the elite in Russia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a struggle between a neoliberal model of capitalism that was heavily promoted by Western interests to facilitate the looting of the economy. In reaction to that, there was an economic nationalism that other members of the elite increasingly advocated, and the shift from Boris Yeltsin, the first post-Soviet president of Russia, to Vladimir Putin marked that shift from the neoliberal model to an economic nationalist model. So what the LaRouchites were promoting, was very much appealing to many of the same folks who were promoting Putin.

LaRouchites were pushing economic nationalism, they were pushing a strong state model of economic development, an emphasis on cultural traditionalism, and then also all of these conspiracy theories that were targeting Western financial institutions and strongholds of neoliberal thought. So, all this sounded pretty good to a number of members of the Russian elite. The LaRouchites went into Russia, they got a hearing, and they were able to circulate a lot of their economic proposals. LaRouche himself was invited to speak before the Duma, the Russian national parliament, in the 1990s. They, I think most strikingly, developed a friendly relationship with Sergey Glazyev who became a close Putin advisor. This is something that’s missing from a lot of the portraits of LaRouche that you see in the United States and elsewhere in the West. But it’s amazing, really, and it’s hard to think of anyone else in the contemporary far right, who’s had that success.

I’ve also read that he had significant success in China also. I don’t know as many of the details, but I have read that LaRouchites writers get a very friendly reception from Chinese state media, routinely being invited to press conferences and other events, and being quoted in the media in a way that it’s just hard to imagine in the United States or other Western countries. So, again, it’s a matter of convergence of the ideology and the vision of political and economic development that LaRouche was promoting and the interests of the elites in these particular countries. In China, the Belt and Road Initiative has been a major cornerstone of China’s international presence and foreign policy stance with regard to much of the Global South... It looks very similar to a lot of the projects that the LaRouchites have been promoting this very centralized, large-scale infrastructure projects, as you referred to earlier. So, again, I think that, in terms of assessing his legacy and his ability to make his mark, there’s a lot more to the idea that this was just a crackpot who claimed that the Queen of England pushes drugs.

TFSR: So much more, but also including...

by the post-COINTELPRO era of the late '70s - early '80s, where there was a lot more, at least congressional if not public and media, scrutiny of intelligence operations from within or based out of the US. But the fact that he and Helga and others were able to build this international network of organizations that continue to operate and have conferences, it's just pretty impressive. But I wonder if you could talk about this, if you're aware of the Schiller Institute or other organizations?

MNL: Just to preface I should say that I've been talking about the National Caucus of Labor Committees, which was the starting point for LaRouche's organization. But LaRouche and his followers built a whole network of a lot of different organizations in the US and elsewhere. The Schiller Institute is a major one. The New Federalist newspapers, one of their leading publications, Executive Intelligence Review, Fusion Energy Foundation was a big one in the '70s and '80s. There's a whole host of others, and they do vary from country to country. In some countries, they have had political parties and in the United States, there was the US Labor Party that existed for a period and then that was disbanded when LaRouche started running in primaries of the Democratic Party. But it's not just one organization. It's a whole constellation of them.

The issue of developing power and access to power is an important part of the LaRouche story and something that sets it apart and hasn't really gotten the serious attention in most cases that deserves. So looking at the first phase of the LaRouche network, the 70s, and 80s, that period is very well documented. They're chronicled in Dennis King's book, *Lyndon LaRouche and the New American Fascism*. Dennis highlights a number of just really impressive successes that the LaRouchites were able to achieve. They fielded thousands of political candidates for political office at all levels in every region of the United States. Occasionally some of these candidates would do well, most spectacularly in one instance, in Illinois, where I believe there were a couple of high-ranking state-level officers, I believe it was the lieutenant governor and Secretary of State or something that, where the LaRouchites captured the democratic nominations. In California, they sponsored two ballot initiatives in the mid-80s to forcibly quarantine people with AIDS that won first 2 million votes and then 1.7 million votes. They raised, in the 1980s, an estimated \$200 million through various largely unscrupulous fundraising practices. They built an extensive intelligence network within the US and beyond that sold intelligence to various private companies, but also had direct contacts with the CIA, the KGB, various right-wing dictatorships, and other political figures.

They engaged in various smear campaigns and dirty tricks operations to, for example, help right-wing political candidates or corrupt labor bosses fend off rank-and-file challenges and various things like this. Through these activities, they developed a friendly relationship with a number of significant figures within the Reagan administration in the 1980s. This fell apart in the late 80s, because the federal government, the Reaganites became unhappy with the fact that LaRouche people were targeting elderly Republicans for their money and were defrauding millions of dollars out of wealthy conservatives. As a result, there was a crackdown, the Feds raided the LaRouche headquarters, Lyndon LaRouche himself was convicted of fraud and conspiracy charges and spent five years in prison.

to suppress any independent thinking and enforce unswerving loyalty among his followers.

Another key piece was a campaign that he led his followers in, again in 1973 or '74, called Operation Mop Up, which was a campaign of physical attacks against members of the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, various Black nationalist groups, and others on the left. What this did was it took his group and cut it off from any normal interaction with other leftists on any comradely terms. He basically said, "We are enemies of the left" and imposed the siege mentality on his followers.

In the following years, through the '70s into the mid-'80s or so, he pursued a political line that was actually very much in support of Reaganism. They were big fans of Reagan's Star Wars programs and supported Jesse Helms, who was a notorious right-wing senator from North Carolina and spearheaded ballot initiatives to forcibly quarantine people with AIDS, and things like this. So, very clearly on the Right.

But starting in the 1990s, they took another turn in terms of how they were presenting themselves publicly. I would say their underlying political ideology didn't really change during this time. But they took on much more of an ostensibly progressive or leftist public face with opposing US military interventions in Yugoslavia and Iraq and elsewhere, denouncing the Christian right, and glorifying Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal as a model for political and economic development. Also, making overtures to certain Black political organizations and presenting themselves as champions of civil rights, and welcoming people of color to their ranks.

These initiatives and ways of presenting themselves helped the LaRouchites starting in the 1990s and later to gain access to leftist audiences and participate in leftist-led demonstrations and in some cases in conferences, and that has continued. So, for example, the Left Forum conference in New York City, which is a leading leftist political conference, over the years, a number of LaRouchites have spoken at the left forum. As recently as 2016. LaRouche's wife, Helga Zepp-LaRouche, was on the program at the Left Forum conference. There are a couple of things going on here. One thing is: conspiracy theories, in general, tend to be very malleable in terms of whether you can give them a right-wing spin or a left-wing spin, depending on what particular representatives of the elite you focus on, and how you present it, so that gave them an inherent flexibility. Then, something really distinctive for the LaRouchites is that almost everybody else on the far Right in the United States, were people who came from the Left themselves. Many of his top lieutenants were very familiar with Marxist theory and Leftist political culture, and just ways of operating in that space in ways that many people on the far right just aren't able to do.

TFSR: I ended up reading a book on Lyndon LaRouche that was published in 1988 or '89, called *Lyndon LaRouche and The New American Fascism* by Dennis King, who was an independent journalist who had butted heads with LaRouche's organization from his journal in New York for quite a while and been targeted by them. But he conducted a lot of interviews with former members.

Just to go back to Operation Mop Up really briefly, because a lot of what I've read is about halfway through his political career, and I'm glad that you can fill in some of the stuff that happened after he got out of prison. But they referenced that some of the people who were in the group claim that around the time that Mop Up was happening, around the time that LaRouche and his lieutenants had spun around the organization to start attacking other Leftist parties, openly declaring war on the Communist Party, attempting to storm events or meetings that were being hosted in parts of the northeast by other parties that he considered enemies, that he was quoting from the strategic guide that was developed by the NSDP, or the Nazi Party in Germany, during the Weimar period. I just thought I'd mention that because that also feels like a pretty crazy part of the history and also foreshadows a lot of the rhetoric and some of the central underpinnings of his conspiracy theory moving forward.

MNL: I'm not recalling those specifics that you're referring to, but I do know that in the '70s, LaRouche was studying fascism and fascist history, particularly Nazi history, and would write about it and talk about it. And not do it in a way that was necessarily laudatory, or saying "Hey, this is great" but doing it in a way that clearly indicated that he was interested in it and was learning from it, or trying to learn from it. For some of those connections, you may need to dig a little bit deeper than just what he's saying on the surface in order to understand his thought processes. But it's certainly something that he was paying attention to.

TFSR: One of us brought up the splintering off from outside connections that LaRouche's organization engaged in during this period. Organizationally, as well as individually stopping people from having personal relationships outside of the organization, these are cultic methods for creating in-groups and out-groups, as well as moderating those relationships through conflicts. LaRouche's organization was really active also in their publications, as well as apparently in the internal organization, at CIA-jacketing people are accusing people of being system stooges and elite actors on behalf of the CIA, including some of his upper lieutenants at various points ostensibly as a way of stopping any erosion of the centrality of his rule within the organization and keeping people on their toes.

So, this was paired with the projection, personally, that was promoted by his organization and through his publications of him being a genius: that if people didn't agree with him, it was simply a matter that they didn't understand or were attempting to undermine him in his message. This is to harken back to what I said before, those math and logic questions that the people were proposing at the table, the purpose I think was meant to draw someone in, make them feel invited, make them feel a bit confused, and that there was an answer that they could expand their knowledge, "check out all these books on economics and mathematics that Lyndon LaRouche published, blah, blah, blah". So I wonder if you would talk a little bit about what political cultism on the left can look like, specifically in the case of LaRouche's organizations, as far as your research has shown you?

Elizabeth is a parasite? Sure, that's pretty easy to sell, it's not hard to back that up. But going from there to the idea that the British Empire still exists and is the true force behind all these terrible things going on in the world. That's part of the leap that they make. So it's related to anti-Semitism but in a complex way.

TFSR: As you pointed out the focus on individual names, the Bilderbergs, or the Vanderbilts, or whatever, these old monies, makes it very easy to issue any discussion about actual systemic oppression or the way that class formation occurs because then it just sounds it's a bloodline issue. Then it's easy to point to old WASP money in the US and what have you for that resentment.

MNL: Yeah. And if I can just point out, to my mind, part of the distinction between a conspiracist approach and a systemic approach to understanding power, it's not are you pointing to specific constituencies. Because, yes, power is exercised in secret. Some powerful people plot and do terrible things behind the scenes. The question is, do you see that as the primary motor of history? Or do you see that as a reflection of institutionalized systems of power that are out in the open? Do you see power as something that is subjective, and it's like, "Well, these particular people who happened to have come along and distorted things," or is it that the specific people matter, but it's not really what's driving things. It's because of capitalism as a system. It's because of racial oppression as a system, patriarchy as a system, rather than the particular foibles or sinister inclinations of whoever happens to be in charge.

TFSR: It's not how mediocre Prince Charles is. It's the fact that there's a Prince Charles. There was the case of Jeremiah Duggan, who, I believe, was English of Jewish background, he attended a gathering in Germany of LaRouchites around 2006-2007. Does this ring a bell to you?

MNL: It does, and he was found dead. I know that this has been something that critics of the LaRouchites have pointed to and raised a lot of questions about in terms of what happened to him. I confess I'm not remembering the details at this time, so I don't really feel that I could speak to it terribly knowledgeably. But I think that, certainly, what we were discussing earlier about the dynamics of cultism and the pressures that people are subjected to, there's no question that those can take a terrible turn. Whether it's a matter of direct physical violence or just psychological violence that can lead people to self-destructive acts, it's really awful.

TFSR: Thank you for the honest answer.

So one of the more shocking things for me about the LaRouche movement is the amount of institutional and para-institutional power that he and his organizations were able to amass. Not just domestically in the US with relations to physicists, and the LaRouchites organization that was trying to push the Star Wars program or weaponizing space lasers, basically, which they've been promoting for well under the Reagan administration, or their connections to the intelligence apparatus and trying to leverage an alternative for [intelligence] people that were feeling a little bit hemmed in

effective, at deflecting charges of anti-Semitism. There are a few elements to this. One thing is that many of LaRouche's supporters and even a number of his top lieutenants were Jews. Coming out of the left, coming out of the radical period in the organization's history, these are people who stayed loyal. So, it made it easier to reject charges of anti-Semitism, to be able to say, "Well, so-and-so is Jewish, how can this group be anti-Semitic?". And then along with that, the LaRouchites became careful not to just target Jews alone. But it would be Jews among various other non-Jews, and often the Jews would be presented not as the ones who were really the top conspirators, but they were being used by other evil-doers. They're part of the conspiracy, but not necessarily the ones behind it. Another tactic was to denounce opponents as Nazis, and so if you could present yourself as being anti-Nazi, then how could you be anti-Semitic if you're being anti-Nazi? These are some of the tactics that they used.

Then another thing is increasingly LaRouche's followers would focus on themes that were rooted in anti-Semitism but weren't obviously anti-Jewish. Such as the idea that there's this struggle in the world between the so-called parasitic finance capital of banking versus productive industrial capital, which is a standard theme in modern anti-Semitism. But to people who aren't in the know, if you spin it the right way, it doesn't necessarily seem that way. Because there are plenty of finance capitalists who were doing horrible things. So there's no difficulty in targeting them in ways that feel genuine.

Another tactic like this is Anglophobia. Hostility to British institutions and elite figures, most spectacularly members of the British Royal Family, but many other leading British figures. The connection with anti-Semitism to a lot of people is just really obscure, but this actually is historically very closely associated with the history of American anti-Semitism. If you look at the pro-Nazi propaganda in the 1930s and 40s, there was a very close association between the Jews and the British as people who were trying to hijack US foreign policy and get America to make the terrible mistake of opposing Nazism. It's partly based on the idea that the British government was controlled by the Rothschilds, the leading Jewish banking family, and all this.

So, the LaRouchites took these themes and developed them within a whole new very elaborate, arcane, conspiracist cosmology, and just very evolved tales about world history and so on. About the Venetians and the Babylonians, and all these weird obscure-sounding characters, many of which, in anti-Semitic literature, are recognized code words or code figures, but to people outside of that world, they just don't really mean anything. But the LaRouchites have developed a whole distinctive terminology for understanding history about the struggle between what they call the humanists who are the good guys, and the oligarchs who are the bad guys. They've been to take different guises through hundreds and thousands of years of history.

It's rooted in anti-Semitic themes, but it doesn't target Jews, generally speaking, directly or explicitly. That makes it much easier to present in ways that aren't going to raise red flags to those who aren't on the alert for it and don't have the background to look for it. For people in leftist circles, for folks who aren't familiar with that history, but who see "Oh, yeah, the International Monetary Fund, yeah, they're pretty terrible. I agree. Or the World Bank or the Federal Reserve... Queen

MNL: You mentioned a little while ago Dennis King's book, *Lyndon LaRouche and The New American Fascism*. That's a really helpful source, which, by the way, is available in full-text online. It's helpful in general for understanding LaRouche's development up until the late '80s when it was published, but in specific for understanding just the role of cultism in his politics. It's clear that the egoism, the notion of LaRouche as a genius, it didn't start in 1973 or something. I've read a number of his writings from earlier, the late '60s – very early '70s, where he'll write an article and then ask some of his comrades in his organization to "critique it". And they'll write comments and they'll say, "Well, we liked this part. We don't like that part." And then his reply is tearing down every criticism that's made, just to show why everything that he said to begin with is right, and everyone who disagrees with him is wrong. So that was before he started using cult psychology.

In terms of how cultism operated in the LaRouche organization, Dennis King teases out several key elements. And one is that LaRouche told his followers that there were assassination threats against him, that there was an immediate crisis, there was an immediate danger of physical harm against him. And that drastic measures needed to be taken. It just made it more difficult for people to respond rationally and made it easier for him to attack anybody who disagreed with him. Another thing is that he used a technique that is standard in cults called ego stripping, which is, as I understand it, you take some of your followers who may be completely loyal, but you humiliate them, you attack them, you vilify them until they break psychologically. Then once they have prostrated themselves, you build them up again, you forgive them, and give them a new identity as your loyal follower. It's like, "Okay, yes, it's terrible what you did on behalf of the CIA, but now that we've gotten that out in the open, in a purge from your psyche, we can move on and continue with our political work." He would do this again and again, and it would have a profound effect not only that people are targeted, but everybody else, like, "Am I going to be next?" And this is something that you see all over. It's not confined to the left or the right, it's a very common technique. A part of it, of course, is that anybody who he wasn't able to compel to obey in this way, would just get kicked out, if they didn't leave of their own volition. So, it didn't take a lot to turn an organization of more or less like-minded people into this body of people who were just scared to think for themselves.

It's important to see why you do this. Part of it certainly was just to feed his own ego and his need for adulation and his need to see himself and be told that he was important and a genius and all these things. But it's also just when you've got several hundred people who were following you without question, that's very powerful, you can do a lot of things with that. He was able to do a lot of political organizing, he was able to raise lots and lots of money and had millions of hours of free labor that were available to him. That's part of what the stakes are.

And I think that also, it contributed to his political freedom of movement. If you have people who are going to follow you unswervingly, it's a lot easier to engage in political zigzags. It's like, "Well, in this context, we need to help the Republicans, but in this context, we need to attack the Republicans. It's all for the cause. Our genius leader is telling us, so we got to do it." These are the kinds of dynamics that you see in a lot of organizations. You see it in religious organizations, and you see it in political organizations all across the political spectrum, unfortunately.

There are other groups on the left, and there are certainly groups on the right that have used similar tactics.

TFSR: Yeah, just to riff off of that... I got an impression, talking about the people that went through the ego stripping and were put in such a potentially precarious emotional and psychological state that their survival and their sense of well-being in the world and their community were so bound up in the words and the whims of this individual... Folks that get caught up in that manipulation, people collectively decide to do terrible things sometimes, and it's consensual. Then there's a question of how much the people that are involved in it are victims, but I feel when people get swept up into a manipulative organism like this, something that you could call a cult, not to say that people don't have agency, but I think there's definitely some thought to be put into the brainwashing that people experience and into how they come out the other side and how to help them through that.

In our last conversation, I wish I'd said more about it. But you mentioned the importance of talking to people who had grown up in far-right Christian fundamentalist households... Helping them, not in deprogramming them, but helping them stabilize, find a balance, find out what they want to do in the world in a way that seems difficult coming out the other end of an organization like this, where you're being told how the world works, and what you're supposed to ask for. Helping people figure out where their feet are at and find out what they want to do next. See, I appreciate you putting a pin in that specifically about the damage that it does to people, the hours of work that people lose to an organization like this. Also, maybe this is a little crass, but in terms of these are people that are drawn in, maybe out of really good revolutionary intentions, into an organism that's meant to crunch them up and just spit them out, turn them into foot soldiers or whatever. Those are potential comrades and community members and lovers and friends that are lost to this process. It's a real shame.

MNL: Yes. At the same time, people can come out of that and take a positive turn. Obviously, it's a struggle, but some people have rejected that background and gone on to do good work and good political work. So it's not hopeless but it is pretty devastating.

TFSR: Yeah, that reminds me just really briefly about another book. The research goes much later, I haven't read it yet, and I look forward to it. Kevin Coogan's book, which I don't know if you could reference, it's *Smiling Man from a Dead Planet*, is that right?

MNL: He's written different things. I'm actually thinking of the book that he did about Francis Parker Yockey, *Dreamer of the Day: Francis Parker Yockey and the Postwar Fascist International*.

TFSR: Under a pseudonym, Kevin Coogan also wrote a book, because apparently Kevin Coogan had been a member of the LaRouche movement for

a little bit...

MNL: That's my understanding. Yes.

TFSR: [It's] this almost 1200-page book called *Smiling Man from a Dead Planet: The Mystery of Lyndon LaRouche* that's available for free on archive.org. This is an individual that I see having come out of this sausage-making machine and not only writing really incisive books about the far right but also being able to take his own experience from this specific organization and warn other people about what was going on.

MNL: I can't speak to that book specifically, but *Dreamer of the Day*, another of Coogan's works, is a very important book if you're interested in understanding the origins of red-brown politics. Francis Parker Yockey is one of the most important figures in the 20th century. That is the most in-depth treatment that I'm aware of. That's been a very helpful source for me. So yeah, you can come out of this movement and do good work.

TFSR: A central theme to the ideology of LaRouche, though danced around at length, is anti-Semitism, which is pretty core to a lot of the conspiracy theories that exist in the West. I wonder if you wouldn't mind talking a little bit about some of the anti-Semitism of the LaRouchites, which I can suggest a few examples that at least the King book had talked about, and how it fit ostensibly into a leftist framework. You mentioned conspiracy theories and how they're sometimes approached from the left or the right, depending on the elites that you're critiquing.

MNL: Sure, yes, anti-Semitism is definitely central to understanding LaRouchite ideology and it's something that is tricky, because it's not plain, open anti-Semitism, such as you find in many Nazi groups and so on. As I mentioned earlier, in the early 1970s, when LaRouche was starting to move away from the genuinely Marxist system-based analysis of power, he was putting out a lot of conspiracy theories that tended to focus on the Rockefellers – Nelson Rockefeller and other members of the Rockefeller petroleum and banking empire – as the main perpetrators of evil in the world. But then, over the next several years, the conspiracy theories that he was putting out there tended to shift focus to center much more on Jews, on rich Jewish bankers, on Jewish political figures, such as Henry Kissinger and Roy Cohn, and others. This was actually, at least partly, in response to a suggestion from the Liberty Lobby, which was one of the leading promoters of fascist anti-Semitic propaganda in the US at the time. They said, "Well, the LaRouche people are doing some good stuff, but they really need to talk more about the Jews." So, LaRouche apparently said, "Okay, I'll do that."

As I mentioned earlier, my understanding is that in the 1990s the LaRouchites were the first political group to promote conspiracy theories centered on George Soros, who since then has gone on to become one of the leading scapegoats for right-wing conspiracism. But unlike a lot of other fascist and far-right groups, the LaRouchites were much more effective, and I think increasingly